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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 002231

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: SPECIAL ASSISTANT EZEKWESILI'S

AGOA/TRANSPARENCY READ-OUT

CLASSIFIED BY COUNSELOR JAMES MAXSTADT FOR REASONS 1.5 (B)  
AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: President Obasanjo's Senior Special Assistant and Head of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit, Oby Ezekwesili, told us December 23 that she thought her transparency presentation at the AGOA Forum was important because it put the anti-corruption issue into the trade discussion and generated further discussion. She thought the AGOA Forum was excellent, and urged more USG interest in AGOA. Separately, the Embassy has received the Textile Visa Application documents from the GON, and forwarded them by fax to AF/W.

12. (C) Dr. Ezekwesili also noted Nigeria's interest in becoming a pilot country under the Evian Declaration on Fighting Corruption and Enhancing Transparency, as the GON was committed to fighting corruption, implementing transparency in GON operations to include energy revenues and budget/procurement implementation, and downsizing government through the sale of GON parastatals. She remarked that the National Assembly and the political opposition might seek to impede President Obasanjo's reforms. The engaging and articulate Ezekwesili is not afraid to take on Nigeria's political elite and, for the moment, has Obasanjo's backing. End Summary.

AGOA: Robust Revenue Transparency Discussion

13. (SBU) On December 23 POL/C and Econoff met with Oby Ezekwesili, Senior Special Assistant to President Obasanjo and Head of the Budget Monitoring and Price Intelligence Unit, for a readout of her participation at the AGOA Forum. Ezekwesili stated that the AGOA Forum was "excellent" and the transparency session discussion, during which she served as a panelist, was "robust and important." She remarked that one cannot talk about international trade without addressing corruption and transparency, and was happy that other delegates at the AGOA Forum shared that view and continued the discussion.

14. (SBU) Dr. Ezekwesili suggested that the next AGOA Forum go further, to look at what developed countries can do to reduce their companies' contributions to corruption in developing countries. (Note: In this she was echoing President Obasanjo's address to Transparency International in November urging it create a parallel Transparency mechanism for developed countries to track and curb their multinationals' bribery of developing countries' governments. End Note.)

15. (SBU) Dr. Ezekwesili also urged the AGOA Forum to dedicate more time to dialogue on transparency in trade issues. "We need to find both domestic and international synergies to address Africa's problems and find links between development and transparency," she said. She requested further USG assistance in promoting and assisting Nigerian businesses in reaping AGOA's benefits.

AGOA Textile Visa Documents Received

16. (U) The Embassy separately received on December 29 the GON's documents applying for the AGOA Textile Visa. Post has faxed them to AF/W.

"Whatever You Call It, It's Transparency"

17. (SBU) Ezekwesili was quite enthusiastic about what Nigeria is doing on all fronts about corruption/transparency, and looked forward to expanding cooperation under Evian or otherwise. She remarked that it makes no difference if Nigeria fights corruption and implements transparency under the 2003 Evian Summit's Anti-Corruption and Transparency Action Plan, the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative's (EITI), NEPAD, or the GON's own banners. She rather pointedly noted that the World Bank is already providing consultants to the GON for its several transparency and anti-corruption programs, but the UK has not provided any assistance to Nigeria under EITI.

18. (SBU) Ezekwesili hoped that, whatever the plan or moniker, by 2007 Nigerians will become so accustomed to good

governance and transparency that they will expect and demand accountability from government. She praised her President's efforts, "Obasanjo has a deep personal outrage over corruption." "The President frees us (the GON economic team) up to do everything we want to implement transparency; what other African president would do that?"

19. (SBU) Ezekwesili was dismissive of the National Assembly's and opposition parties' role in combating corruption and encouraging transparency. Their opposition was to President Obasanjo, and was expected. Nonetheless, she stated that a hidden political benefit in the GON's civil service reforms (cutting staff; monetizing housing and transportation perks) would be that Assembly members could now deflect constituents' complaints that the GON spends almost all its resources paying civil servant salaries. The Special Assistant remarked that the GON is also committed to privatizing government-owned parastatals. Both politicians and the public will eventually understand that the era of Nigerians depending on GON contracts and bureaucracy is over; "Big Daddy is gone for good."

#### Biographic Notes -----

10. (C) Charming, straightforward but sometimes brusque, Dr. Oby Ezekwesili is an engaging and articulate interlocutor. She is also a commanding figure who takes charge of her staff and audience during meetings. In one-on-one meetings, Ezekwesili is honest, intelligent and thoughtfully responds to questions, but she can also be self-righteous at times and pollyannaish about President Obasanjo's economic policy and achievements.

11. (C) The quick witted Ezekwesili is not afraid to criticize or chastise individuals or institutions. In an earlier mid-December meeting, she berated Ministry of Communication officials for underhanded dealings, and said that European contractors had cheated the GON over the years through providing substandard materials and training to Nigeria while paying off unscrupulous GON officials.

12. (C) In the media, she has characterized possible U.S. forgiveness of Nigeria's debt as not a favor to the GON but rather a response to a threat to globalization. Most Nigerians, she said, are "trapped by debt and don't know where their next meal will come from." In an earlier private meeting with Embassy officials, the Special Adviser stated that it is in the United States' interest to help Nigeria become democratic and economically viable in order to create new markets for American goods and services.

13. (C) During the December 23 meeting, the Special Assistant remarked that she admired and respected her close friend and former professor at Harvard, Dr. Jendayi Frazer, Senior Director for African Affairs at the National Security Council. Ezekwesili claimed to have been instrumental in formulating President Bush's 2000 campaign Africa policy with Frazer. Ezekwesili studied Public Administration at Harvard's Kennedy School of Government in the late 1990s and early 2000s, and hold great affinity toward fellow Harvard graduates such as Nasir El-Rufai, the GON's Minister of the Federal Capital Territory. Ezekwesili and El-Rufai are both members of Obasanjo's inner circle of economic advisers.

14. (U) Ezekwesili was one of the founding directors of Transparency International (TI) and founded TI's Nigerian chapter. She served on the board of Tufts University's Education for Public Inquiry and International Citizenship, and also at the Center for Democracy and Development based in the United Kingdom. The Special Assistant has three sons. Ezekwesili is a fervent Christian. Her husband is a pastor with the Redeemed Christian Church of Christ.  
Roberts